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SUBJECT: SENIOR USG PARTICIPATION REQUESTED FOR THE 2009
MENA-OECD MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

¶1. (U) This is an action request; please see paragraph 7.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: The Middle East and North Africa initiative of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (MENA-OECD) is holding a Ministerial Conference at the Palmeraie Convention Center in Marrakesh on November 23. CDA and EconOff attended a briefing for Ambassadors and senior Government of Morocco (GOM) officials to discuss the upcoming event. Presided by the Minister of Economic and General Affairs Nizar Baraka and the Minister of Modernization of Public Sectors Mohammed Abbou, along with OECD representatives, the briefing provided a general overview of plans for the Ministerial Conference and included a call for participation at senior political levels. The Moroccan Prime Minister, Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Egyptian Minister of Investment, among others, have confirmed attendance. The goal of the Conference is to bring together MENA and OECD Ministers, along with representatives from business and civil society, to seek solutions to the challenges of creating economic growth during a time of financial crisis. Working group meetings on governance, investment and public sector integrity are scheduled within the next few weeks in preparation for the conference in Paris and Cairo. A Business Forum and Women's Leadership Summit and a Governance Forum have also been organized by MENA-OECD for November 22. Post recommends high-level participation, as this conference underscores the importance and utility of strengthening regional dialogue. End Summary.

MENA-OECD Ministerial

¶3. (SBU) The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) initiative of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) will hold its 2009 Ministerial Conference entitled "Beyond the Crisis: Business and Citizens at the Center of Policy Responses" in Marrakesh on November 23. The Conference will bring together Ministers charged with investment and public governance policies to exchange solutions for the ongoing economic crisis. The outcome of the gathering, highlighted Minister Baraka at a September 16 Ambassadorial briefing, will be the "Marrakesh Declaration." This Declaration, he continued, will show the strong commitment of MENA and OECD countries to pursuing priority public governance and business climate reforms to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis on growth, employment and public services. The Ministerial will be the first time ministers of investment policy and public governance affairs will meet to provide strategic responses to the current economic global context, noted OECD Chief of Public Sector Management Martin Forst at the briefing.

¶4. (SBU) The program will be presided by Prime Minister

Abbas El Fassi who will accept handover of the MENA-OECD initiative chairmanship from Egypt to Morocco. The Secretary General of OECD Angel Gurría, Egyptian Minister of Investment Dr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs Miguel Angel Moratinos and UNDP Administrator Helen Clark are all scheduled to take part in the event. Topics will include "responses beyond the crisis," "regional reform achievements," and the adoption of the Ministerial "Marrakesh" Declaration. Working group meetings in preparation for the Ministerial are planned for the end of September and early October in Egypt and France on investment policy and promotion and entrepreneurship and human capital development.

15. (SBU) Two separate forums are scheduled for November 22 in addition to the Ministerial Conference. The MENA-OECD Business Forum and Women Business Leaders Summit will be an opportunity for business representatives and entrepreneurs to develop action-oriented strategies to face the economic future of the MENA region with a strong reform agenda in place, said OECD Chief of Private Sector Development Alexander Bohmer. Participants will be able to debate issues of critical importance to the region, Bohmer added, such as tapping the potential of women's entrepreneurship and fostering responsible business conduct. Alongside the Business Forum on November 22 will be a Governance Forum, which will promote debate on the governance pre-conditions for economic recovery and sustainable growth, taking into consideration the needs of citizens, the demands of society, and environmental challenges.

16. (U) Logistical details for the Ministerial and Forums can be found online at www.oecd.org/ministerial2009.

REQUEST FOR USG REPRESENTATION

17. (SBU) Comment and Action Request: Post highly recommends senior USG participation in the Ministerial Conference on November 23, which will be a unique opportunity for dialogue among MENA and OECD Ministers on the importance of regional cooperation in confronting today's socio-economic challenges. Post requests NEA/MAG and EEB provide a list of USG participants as soon as possible. Post also suggests USG participation in the November 22 Business and Governance Forums. End Comment and Action Request.

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Millard